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INFO RUEHAH/AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT 3465
RUEHTA/AMEMBASSY ASTANA 9675
RUEHEK/AMEMBASSY BISHKEK 4081
RUEHDBU/AMEMBASSY DUSHANBE 3944
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 0683
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 1659
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0006
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2144
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 0847
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L TASHKENT 001999

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SUBJECT: DEATHS IN CUSTODY - TORTURE REPORTED

Classified By: P/E Chief Ted Burkhalter; reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. Summary: (C) Human rights activist Surat Ikramov told P/E Chief November 20 that two convicted members of Hizb ut-Tahrir had died in an Andijon prison in recent weeks. Both, he said, had been tortured. Ikramov had not seen the bodies himself but said he believed the families, who were his source of information. He said he would try to arrange for a meeting next week between emboffs and a sister of one of the deceased, who lives in Tashkent. Separately, the Chief of Staff to the Uzbek Parliament's Ombudsman for Human Rights confirmed that one of the individuals had died but told embassy's political specialist that the cause was tuberculosis. End summary.

¶2. (C) According to Ikramov, Tohir Nurmammedov died in prison November 13 as a result of torture. On November 12, meanwhile, authorities delivered the body of Fitrat Salohiddinov to his family. Ikramov reported that he too had died as a result of torture. Both men were held in Andijon prison, and both were convicted of membership in Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT).

¶3. (C) Parliamentary Ombudsman for Human Rights Chief of Staff Maruf Usmanov told embassy political specialist Ibrat Usmanov (no relation) on November 20 that Nurmammedov had indeed died but that he had succumbed to tuberculosis and had passed away in hospital. Ikramov told P/E Chief that he had spoken with the family of Nurmammedov and had been told that the man had very recently been in good health. Ikramov said he considered the families' information to be credible and promised to try to facilitate a meeting for emboffs with Nurmammedov's sister.

Comment: Who to believe?

¶4. (C) Ikramov has good connections with the families of imprisoned HT members and has introduced embassy personnel to them on previous occasions. While we cannot verify all of his information all of the time - and neither can he - we have on numerous occasions found that his information was indeed accurate. While HT as an organization is not above providing false or misleading information, we have generally found that families in mourning have provided accurate details to human rights defenders. On the other hand, the

GOU has a long-established record of providing inaccurate causes of death for imprisoned HT members. The two cases just reported give us considerable scope for concern that the long pattern of deaths in custody continues in Uzbek prisons.

¶5. (C) Separately, ICRC notes that these deaths highlight the importance of independent access to prisoners. ICRC told Ambassador November 20 that it expects (finally) to meet with Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) in the next few days, to seek agreement on a prisons visit protocol.
NORLAND